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C O N F I D E N T I A L LIMA 003015

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/24/2016
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PHUM](#) [VE](#) [PE](#)
SUBJECT: PERU ON CUBA: OFFICIALS/JOURNALISTS SEE CHANGE
COMING

REF: LIMA 3014

Classified By: A/POL David C. Brooks, for Reasons 1.4 (c,d)

Summary:

11. (C) Peruvian Foreign Minister Jose Garcia Belaunde maintains that Fidel Castro's condition is more serious than reported and foresees change in Cuba as a result of the Cuban dictator's illness. Well-connected Peruvian journalists agree that Raul Castro could not maintain the communist regime and expressed interest in the Cuba Transition Committee's timely report in a meeting with Ambassador on 8/1. These opinions parallel Peruvian Prime Minister Jorge del Castillo's prudent assessment of the Cuban situation, which contrasted with the statements of some other Latin American leaders, some of whom fell over themselves expressing solidarity with Castro (Reftel). End Summary.

12. (C) In an August 1 meeting with the Ambassador, Foreign Minister Garcia Belaunde said he had information from an unspecified source that Castro actually underwent surgery on the evening of Saturday, July 29; the announcement that executive power would be transferred to Raul Castro happened only after the surgery went bad. Garcia Belaunde expressed great confidence that unstoppable pressure would build within Cuba for a democratic transition. Castro's inner circle are trying to do what Spain's Falangists attempted as Franco left the scene--they are trying to tie the transfer of power down in such a way as to ensure continuity. It would not work any more in Cuba, the Foreign Minister said, than it had in Spain as people who hunger for change would pop out of the regime's own apparatus.

13. (C) Garcia Belaunde expressed some concern that the exile community in Miami could complicate a transition by seeking to displace Cubans on the island. The Ambassador noted that among the principles laid out in the Cuba Transition Commission's plan recently approved by President Bush is that the leaders of a democratic transition will come from Cuba itself rather than Miami or Washington. The Ambassador promised to forward the full report to MFA's Americas Division for their study.

14. (C) Cuba was a principle topic of conversation during an August 1 farewell lunch for the Press Attache with leading media figures. (Peruvian attendees included the three hosts of the most watched "Larry King"-style political talk shows, the owner and leading editorialist of Peru's largest daily newspaper, and the country's first and second most listened

to radio program hosts.) The predominant view was that Fidel's attempt to preserve his regime after his death was doomed to fail; Raul Castro would be unable to contain the pressures for change and demands for democratization. There was a high-level of interest in the Cuba Transition Commission's timely report, combined with concerns that Cuban Americans might not cooperate with a USG plan that emphasized the role of democratic activists on the island. (Comment: We expect to receive requests from leading journalists to interview Secretary Gutierrez or Caleb McCarry about the transition report.)

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